

MOWER EFFICIENCY

Mid-size, walk-behind mowers are replacing mid-size riding mowers and small trim mowers for many maintenance contractors.



The 36-inch Exmark, a new entry in out-front mowers.

By BRUCE F. SHANK, Executive Editor

Sales of mid-range, walk-behind mowers are booming according to manufacturers and distributors called recently by *Weeds Trees & Turf*.

Price and Efficiency are the reasons why, according to landscape maintenance managers.

"We do see contractors going from larger to smaller mowers for cost-effective reasons," says John Kinkead of National Mower Co. "Many contractors are replacing 21-inch push mowers with 36-inch or wider walk-behind mowers," reports Stan Byers, president of Bunton Corp.

"I started to notice the switch two years ago," says Ron Kujawa, owner of Kujawa Enterprises in Cudahy, WI. "But, it is very difficult to make a blanket statement. Every working site is different. Overall, the mid-range walk-behind mower is being utilized more by maintenance contractors."

Kujawa sells F.D. Kees mid-range mowers, but he also mentioned the new Ex-Mark, Bobcat, Bunton, Giant Vac, and Gravely walk-behinds.

"For years there was a tradition for contractors to upgrade from handmowers to 48-inch or larger riding mowers, says Don Synnestvedt, vice president of Theodore Brickman Co., Long Grove, IL. "This is no longer the case."

"Time-motion studies have proven to me that in a large proportion of our work the walk-behind mower is more cost effective than riding or small push

mowers," says Carl McCord, President of Landscape Design and Construction of Dallas, TX. "Anything under 52-inches wide might as well be walk-behind. The workers find the walk-behinds more maneuverable and cooler to operate."

Dave Marsh, president of Industrial Landscape Services, Cupertino, CA, "We use 36-inch walk-behinds for trimming. A typical crew has one 21-inch and two 36-inch walk-behinds on their truck. We don't have many jobs with a large amount of flat area, however. You can almost do an average mowing job with just the walk-behind. "We have two riding mowers which we transport crew to crew where needed. But, they probably get less than 2 hours use per day."

"We bought one Bobcat in 1981 and have since bought four more," says Al Alvarino of Classic Landscapes, Raleigh, NC. "They are a third of the cost of riding mowers. We use our trim mowers only for around patios. Our mowing crews get as much as 7 hours a day from the walk-behinds."

"Bigger seems to be better," says

Ted Smith, president of Smithco. "Depending on what type of turf areas he has to mow, the contractor is buying wider mowers so he can get more done and therefore save time and money on most every job. This also applies to riding mowers."

"The real impact or trend, if there is one, is hard to identify statistically," says Steve Williams, senior marketing manager for Toro Commercial Products. "It really depends upon the nature of the contracts. A riding mower remains more cost effective in many cases. With a riding mower, there are certain space restrictions which a walk-behind may be able to handle." Williams would not divulge Toro's plans in the walk-behind area.

Roger Thomas of Jacobsen, feels there is an equally great trend toward riding type units with grass catchers. "In recessionary times, many smaller businesses start up and they may be buying the smaller pieces."

Byers of Bunton disagrees. He finds both large and small firms switching. The large walk-behinds

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Conwed mulch promotes germination of these grasses by retaining moisture and shielding the seeds from temperature fluctuations.

The Future

Our mulch use will definitely expand in the coming years. Through a \$9.7 million bond issue passed in 1978, Charlotte has funding for new recreation areas. The money is earmarked for natural

preserves, district parks, neighborhood parks and special facilities. We just purchased, for example, almost 700 acres for a natural preserve. It will have hiking, camping, scenic trails, lakes and other features. Wood fiber mulch will help us develop grass in appropriate areas.

In short, the addition of hydraulic mulching to our landscape program has given us greater flexibility.

We know we have a desirable, labor-saving alternative to straw.

That's important in light of our expansion plans. We conducted a study to project community needs to 1990. The study recommended we more than double the number of athletic fields to 250 and increase other facilities as well.

We'll be working with creek banks, flood plain land, swells and other spots where erosion presents a problem. Wood-fiber mulch is a good choice in these cases, and I'd recommend it to other park supervisors facing similar situations. **WTT**

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individual generally is ineligible for unemployment compensation if his termination was caused by poor attendance, violation of company policy, disregard of a supervisor's request, poor work performance, or dishonest act, such as falsifying time records. Whenever possible, the employer should give a "final warning" prior to termination, so there is no doubt that the employee is informed of the consequences of his future conduct. If an employee is ineligible, the turf employer will save money by paying a lower state unemployment tax.

The very nature of the turfgrass industry requires creative approaches to minimizing the financial detriment of employee turnover due to layoffs. **WTT**

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can trim closer and mow on a slight grade, some things big machines can't claim. The big riders cost anywhere from \$9,000 to \$12,000 while a walk-behind, self-propelled unit costs between \$2,200 and \$3,000. They are less expensive than tractors and are more serviceable. Our 40-inch mower fits between the wheel wells of compact pick-ups and the 48-inch will fit similarly on a standard-sized pickup."

Carl McCord is preparing to reveal his time-motion study results in the near future. At that time, the specific types of jobs and efficiency of various mowers will be known. It is a trend worth watching. **WTT**



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